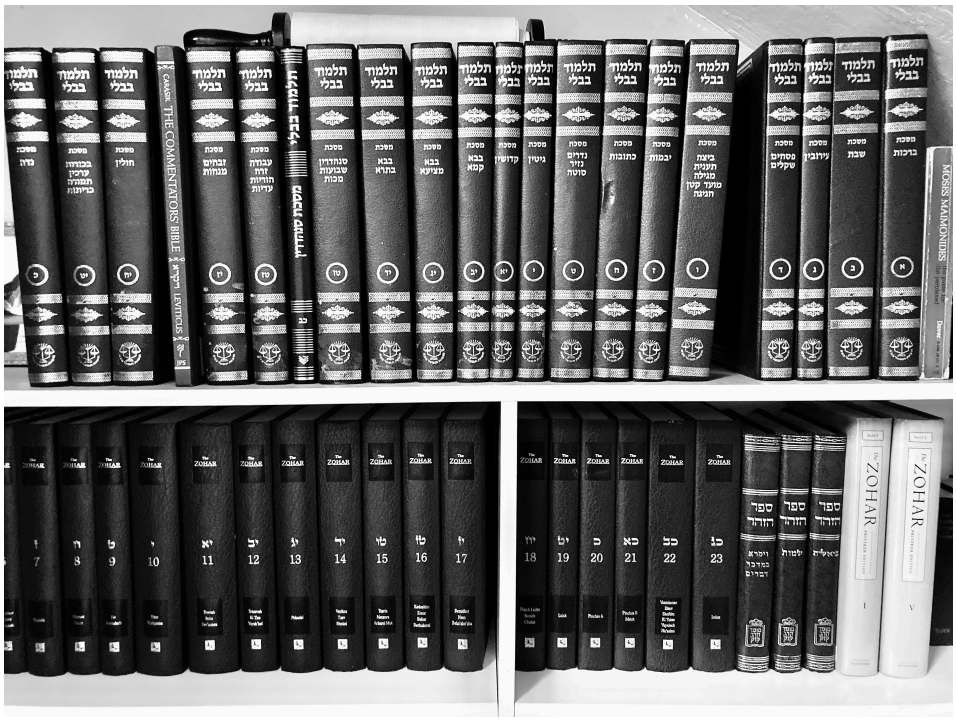
The Four T's – Session Three

Text: The Formative Words of Jewish Law, Lore and Imagination

Rabbi Irwin Keller – Fall 2021



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THE HEBREW BIBLE: TORAH AND TANAKH

Torah is a word that can refer to different things: It can refer to the "Five Books of Moses" (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, referred to as Pentateuch in Greek and *Chumash* in Hebrew). The Torah scroll that we read in synagogue is this. The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Torah can also refer to the entire Hebrew Bible, made up of 24 or 39 books, depending on how you count. More technically the 24 or 39 books are referred to as Tanakh – a Hebrew acronym standing for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* ("Prophets") and *Ketuvim* ("Writings"). A list of the 39 books is on the next page.

Torah can more figuratively be used to refer to Jewish ancient text more generally, or to inspired wisdom ("How thrilling it was when the new rabbi shared her torah with us").

The Torah, in the narrow sense of the Five Books, takes us from the Creation of the Universe through the death of Moses. It's internal origin story is that it was given to the Children of Israel at Mt. Sinai, through the intermediary of Moshe. This concept of Torah as given at Mt. Sinai, of Torah being the living word of God, is captured in the Hebrew *Torah MiSinai* – "Torah from Sinai."

Torah is read in its scroll form at synagogues around the world. This practice dates back to biblical times. In the Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, details the first public reading of the Torah in Jerusalem by Ezra the Scribe in the 5th Century BCE. The ritual surrounding the reading was similar to what is still done today. Even at that time, interpreters were needed to simultaneously translate the Hebrew of Torah for the ears of the Aramaic-speaking Jewish population. The role of the *targeman,* or translator, continued in synagogues until near-modern times. In antiquity, two primary Aramaic translations of Tanakh, called *targumim,* were held as authoritative – Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonatan – although sometimes their translations are not literal but explanatory or *midrashic.*

Books of Tanakh

Torah ("Teaching")	Nevi'im ("Prophets")	K'tuvim ("Writings")
Genesis *(B'reishit)*	Joshua	Psalms *(T'hilim)*
Exodus *(Sh'mot)*	Judges *(Shoftim)*	Proverbs *(Mishlei)*
Leviticus *(Vayikra)*	Samuel (I & II)	Job *(Iyov)*
Numbers *(B'Midbar)*	Kings *(M'lakhim)* (I & II)	
Deuteronomy *(D'varim)*	Isaiah	Song of Songs *(Shir HaShirim)*
	Jeremiah	Ruth
	Ezekiel	Lamentations *(Eykhah)*
	The Twelve:	Ecclesiastes *(Kohelet)*
	Hosea	Esther
	Joel	
	Amos	Daniel
	Obadiah	Ezra-Nehemiah
	Jonah	Chronicles *(Divrei Hayamim)* (1 & II)
	Micah	
	Nachum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

Canonization of the Books of Tanakh

The canonization of Tanakh took place in the first century CE. The rabbis, in doing this, made the decision that true prophecy ended with Malachi (around 450 BCE), and that Book of Ezra (around 400 BCE) would be considered the last of the teachings offered by the Hebrew Bible. Regarding other works, such as the Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job), and the Scrolls or *megillot* (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther), the rabbis had to consider their validity, sanctity, and appropriateness. Famously, Song of Songs was the most controversial inclusion because of its erotic nature. Rabbi Akiva argued for its inclusion as an allegory of the love between God and Israel, and defended its importance. In his words: "All of eternity is not as worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the Writings are holy, but Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

Apocrypha

Numerous books that were not accepted into the Hebrew Biblical canon, at least not for mainstream Judaism. Nonetheless they are sometimes read and referenced even though not considered to be sacred works. The books of the Apocrypha include the Book of Maccabbees, the Book of Enoch, the Wisdom of Sirach, the Book of Judith, the Book of Tobit, the Psalms of Solomon, and many others.

Torah Reading and the Triennial Cycle

In ancient times, the *parshiyot* of Torah were read and completed over the course of a year. Whereas in Palestine it was the practice to read the Torah over the course of three years, in the ancient "triennial cycle."

In modern times, the Conservative Movement took the lead on creating a different kind of Triennial Cycle. Each *parashah* is divided in three. On year one, the first section of each *parashah* is read; in year two the second part; in year three the third part. This has the advantage of lessening the Torah-reading pressure while still maintaining a sense of completion of the the cycle every year at Simchat Torah time. We are currently (5782) in Triennial Year 3.

Torah Parshiyot

Torah is divided into 54 weekly *parshiyot.* In non-leap years, the Hebrew calendar has only about 49-50 weeks. So some *parshiyot* get paired. (Those portions are in red in the chart below.)

Here is a list of *parshiyot* with just a few highlights to help track Torah's flow:

Genesis

B'reishit	Creation of the World; first Shabbat; Garden of Eden; Cain and Abel
Noach	Noah and the Flood; Tower of Babel
Lekh L'kha	Avram and Sarai; God's command to Avram to leave his homeland; covenant with God; Hagar and Ishmael; Abraham adopts practice of circumcision
Vayera	Angels visit and prophesy a child for Sarah. Isaac if born. Hagar and Ishmael are banished. Abraham argues God for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. God tests Abraham, asking him to sacrifice Isaac.
Chayei Sarah	Sarah dies. Abraham sends a servant to arrange a marriage for Isaac. We meet Rebecca. Abraham dies and his buried by Isaac and Ishmael.
Toldot	Rebecca gives birth to Esau and Jacob. Esau sells Jacob his birthright. Jacob gains his father's blessing, meant for Esau, by deception. He then flees.
Vayetzei	Jacob dreams of a ladder and a renewal of covenant. Jacob is taken in by his uncle Laban. Falls in love with Rachel, is tricked into marrying Leah. Many children with Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. Rachel finally she conceives and bears Joseph.
Vayishlach	Jacob wrestles an angel and reunited with Esau. Dinah is raped and the men of Shechem killed.
Vayeshev	Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt. The story of Judah and Tamar. Joseph in Potiphar's household and then in prison.
Miketz	Pharaoh dreams and Joseph interprets: 7 years of famine coming. Joseph riases to power. Re-meets his brothers who come to Egypt to buy food.
Vayigash	Judah pleads with Joseph for Benjamin's freedom. Joseph reveals himself as their brother. Jacob and his family move to Egypt.
Vayechi	Jacob blesses his sons and grandsons and dies. Joseph instructs his brothers to carry his bones back to Canaan and dies.

Exodus

Sh'mot	A new pharaoh arises who did not know Joseph. Enslaves the Israelites, who are now numerous. Pharaoh imposes killing of male Israelite babies. Midwives Shifrah and Puah do not obey. Moses is born and floated downriver, and taken in by pharaoh's daughter. His mother, Yocheved, becomes his nurse. Moses grows up, kills an Egyptian taskmaster and flees. He lives in Midyan for 40 years, then sees a Burning Bush. God commands him to take off his shoes – this is holy ground. He is given the mission of taking the Children of Israel out of Egypt.
Va'era	Pharaoh resists Moshe's efforts. The first seven plagues are brought down on Egypt.
Bo	The last three plagues, and the instructions for the first Passover. Pharaoh tells the Israelites to leave.
B'shalach	Pharaoh changes his mind and follows the Israelites. The Sea parts, the Isrelites cross and sing the Song of the Sea. Miracles of manna and clean water. The Amalekites attack.
Yitro	Moses' father-in-law Yitro comes and helps him organize a governing system. The Children of Israel draw near the Mountain and God gives the Ten Commandments.
Mishpatim	Moshe continues to give over a series of laws.
T'rumah	Instructions for making the *mishkan.*
T'tzaveh	Instructions for the oil for the lamps and the priestly garments.
Ki Tisa	The Golden Calf. The Thirteen Attributes. Work on the *mishkan* gets underway.
Vayak'hel	Work on the *mishkan* continues.
P'kudei	The *mishkan* is set up.

Leviticus

Vayikra	The laws of the *korbanot* (sacrifices) are laid out.
Tzav	Instructions on the priestly practices and ordination of Aaron and sons.
Sh'mini	The *mishkan* is open for business. Nadav and Avihu are killed after offering strange fire. Dietary laws of *kashrut* are set out.
Tazria	Element of ritual impurity.
M'tzora	Laws of purification after disease or discharge.
Acharei Mot	The Yom Kippur ritual, including the two goats. More purity laws.
K'doshim	Holiness laws, ethical laws, sexual prohibitions.
Emor	Purity rules for priests. Setting forth the calendar of festivals.
B'har	The *shmitah* year, and limits on debt servitude.
B'chukotai	Blessings for following the law. Curses for disobeying. Law of vows.

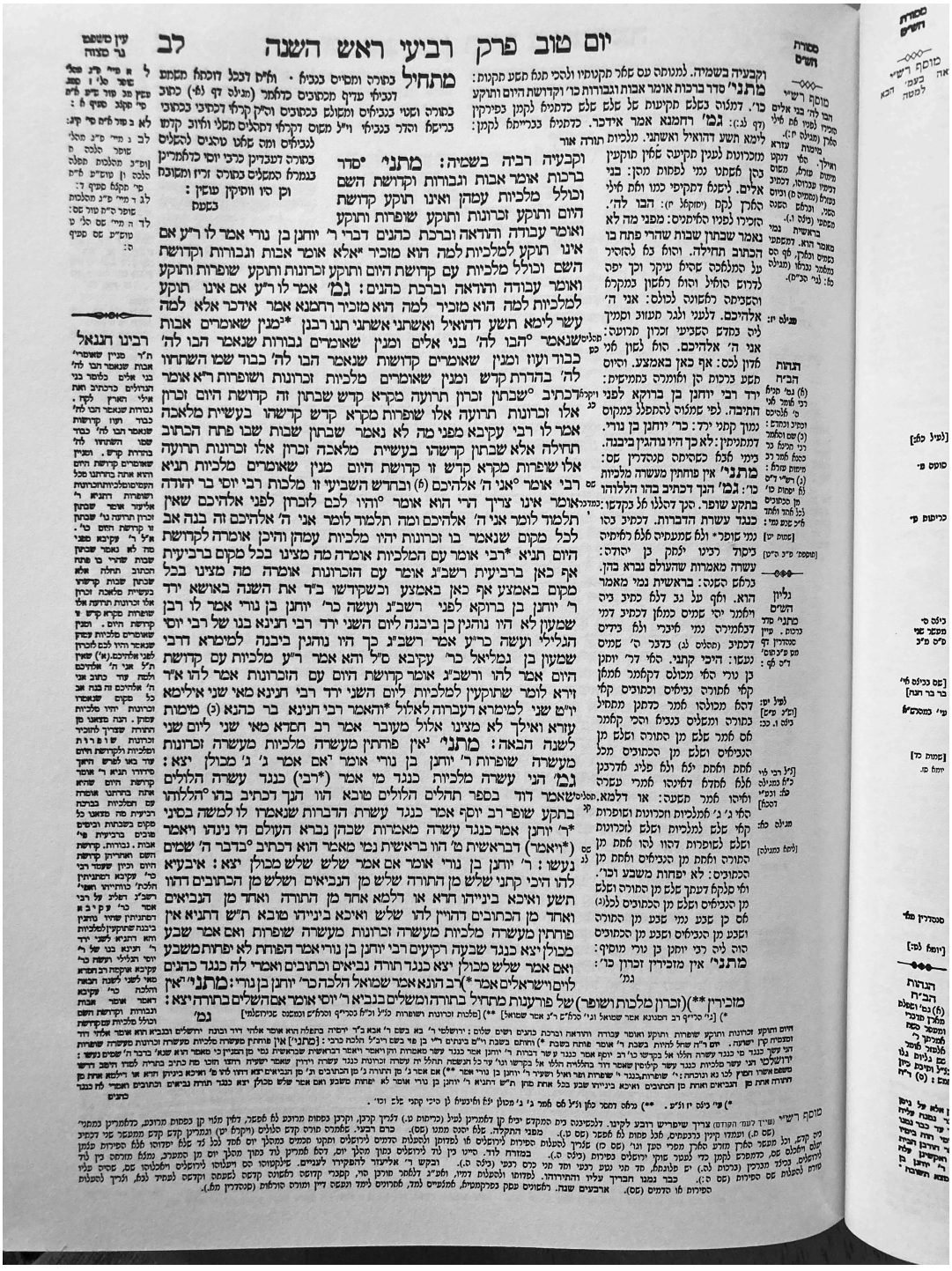
Numbers

B'midbar	A census is taken. More about the priests' responsibilities.
Naso	Camp purification. Restitution for wrongs. Wives accused of unfaithfulness.
B'haalot'kha	The *menorah* of the *mishkan.* Consecration of the Levites. Cloud and fire leading the Israelites. Miriam and Aaron question Moses. Miriam is struck down with a disease. Moses says *El na r'fa na lah* and she is healed.
Sh'lach	Scouts are sent into the Promised Land. They return with reports of milk and honey, but also of people big as giants. A Sabbath violator is stoned to death.
Korach	Korach leads a rebellion against Moses. A sinkhole and a plague are the response.
Chukat	The Red Heifer ritual, for purification of the priests after contact with a corpse, is laid out. Aaron and Miriam die. Moses strikes the rock to bring forth water rather than speaking to it. Israelites begin conquering.
Balak	Balak, king of Moab, hires Bil'am to curse the Israelites. Bil'am faces obstacles, and his donkey speaks to him. Eventually Bil'am sees the Israelite camp, and instead of curse, he blesses: *mah tovu ohaleykha Ya'akov* – "how goodly are thy tents O Jacob."
Pinchas	Pinchas kills an intermarried couple in order to end a plague. The Daughters of Tzelofchad sue for inheritance rights.
Matot	Law of vows. Conquest of Midianite towns.
Mas'ei	A list of all the stations of the journeys of the Israelites. Instructions on entering the Land of Israel. Epilogue to the Daughters of Tzelofchad.

Deuteronomy

D'varim	Now at the end of 40 years, Moses begins a great speech reviewing all that had happened to them together. He recounts the setting up of government, the incident of the twelve scouts, and some conquests.
V'et'chanan	Moses recalls begging God to see the Promised Land, setting up cities of refuge, reciting the Ten Commandments, reciting Shema.
Eikev	Moses reminds the people of the blessing of following the commandments and the curse that follows disobedience. He recalls the Golden Calf and the two sets of tablets.
R'eh	Moses sets before the Israelites blessing and curse, life and death; therefore choose life. Moses warns against idolatry and reminds the people of *kashrut,* tithes, and the *shmitah* year.
Shoftim	Moses sets out rules for judges, kings, Levites, prophets, cities of refuge, witnesses, war, and unsolved murders.

Ki Teitzei	Moses sets out a wide range of domestic laws, including inheritance, rooftop safety, levirate marriage, payment of wages, and treatment of domestic animals. Also a commandment to blot out the name of Amalek.
Ki Tavo	Moses sets out ceremony of first fruits. More warnings re blessings and curses.
Nitzavim	Moses says that everyone is gathered for this covenant with God. Moses explains that the *mitzvot* are not too distant – not in heaven and not across the sea. But in our mouths and our hearts.
Vayelekh	Moses tells the Israelites to be of good heart; God and Joshua would lead them into the promised land. Commandment to read the law to the people every seven years. God tells Moses that God will hide God's face from the people after Moses dies; he should therefore write a song as testimony to the people.
Ha'azinu	Moses sings his song. It includes a recitation of the Israelites' sins, a prophecy of their punishment, and a promise of their redemption.
V'zot Habrakhah	Moses offers blessings to the 12 Tribes. Moses' death is then recounted.



יום טוב פרק רביעי ראש השנה לב

מתחיל

מתני׳ סדר ברכות אומר אבות וגבורות וקדושת השם וכולל מלכיות עמהן ואינו חותם קדושת היום ותוקע וזכרונות ותוקע שופרות ותוקע ואומר עבודה והודאה וברכת כהנים דברי ר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אמר לו ר״ע אם אינו חותם למלכיות למה הוא מזכיר למה הוא מוכיר רחמנא אמר אידכר אלא למה עשר לימא תשע דהואיל ואשתרי תנו רבנן *מנין שאומרים אבות שנאמר °הבו לה׳ בני אלים ומנין שאומרים גבורות שנאמר הבו לה׳ כבוד ועוז ומנין שאומרים קדושת השם שנאמר הבו לה׳ כבוד שמו השתחוו לה׳ בהדרת קדש ומנין שאומרים מלכיות וזכרונות ושופרות ר״א אומר ברכות אומר אבות וגבורות וקדושת השם וכולל מלכיות עמהן ואינו חותם קדושת היום ותוקע וזכרונות ותוקע שופרות ותוקע ואומר עבודה והודאה וברכת כהנים: גמ׳ אמר לו ר״ע אם אינו חותם למלכיות למה הוא מזכיר למה הוא מוכיר רחמנא אמר אידכר אלא למה עשר לימא תשע דהואיל ואשתרי תנו רבנן *מנין שאומרים אבות שנאמר °הבו לה׳ בני אלים ומנין שאומרים גבורות שנאמר הבו לה׳ כבוד ועוז ומנין שאומרים קדושת השם שנאמר הבו לה׳ כבוד שמו השתחוו לה׳ בהדרת קדש ומנין שאומרים מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות ר״א אומר אל״ף בי״ת גי״ם דל״ת הי״ו וי״ו זי״ן חי״ת טי״ת יו״ד כ״ף ל״מ נו״ן סמ״ך ע״י פ״א צ״ק ר״ש ש״ת תי״ו מפני מה אמרו עשרים ושתים אותיות בתורה כנגד עשרים ושתים פעמים שנברא בהן העולם ומפני מה אמרו עשרים ושתים אותיות בתפלה כנגד עשרים ושתים פעמים שנברא בהן העולם: וקבעיה בשמיה: מתני׳ °סדר ברכות אומר אבות וגבורות וקדושת השם וכולל מלכיות עמהן ואינו חותם קדושת היום ותוקע וזכרונות ותוקע שופרות ותוקע ואומר עבודה והודאה וברכת כהנים דברי ר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אמר לו ר״ע אם אינו תוקע למלכיות למה הוא מזכיר *אלא אומר אבות וגבורות וקדושת השם וכולל מלכיות עם קדושת היום ותוקע וזכרונות ותוקע שופרות ותוקע ואומר עבודה והודאה וברכת כהנים: גמ׳ אמר לו ר״ע אם אינו תוקע למלכיות למה הוא מוכיר למה הוא מזכיר רחמנא אמר אידכר אלא למה עשר לימא תשע דהואיל ואשתרי תנו רבנן *מנין שאומרים אבות שנאמר °הבו לה׳ בני אלים ומנין שאומרים גבורות שנאמר הבו לה׳ כבוד ועוז ומנין שאומרים קדושת השם שנאמר הבו לה׳ כבוד שמו השתחוו לה׳ בהדרת קדש ומנין שאומרים מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות ר״א אומר אל״ף בי״ת גי״ם דל״ת הי״ו וי״ו זי״ן חי״ת טי״ת יו״ד כ״ף ל״מ נו״ן סמ״ך ע״י פ״א צ״ק ר״ש ש״ת תי״ו מפני מה אמרו עשרים ושתים אותיות בתפלה כנגד עשרים ושתים פעמים שנברא בהן העולם: מתני׳ °אין פותחין מעשרה מלכיות זכרונות ומעשרה שופרות ר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אומר °אם אמר ג׳ ג׳ מכולן יצא: גמ׳ הני עשרה מלכיות כנגד מי אמר (*רבי) כנגד עשרה הללים שאמר דוד בספר תהלים הללוי׳ טובא הוו הכי דכתיב °הללוהו בתקע שופר רב יוסף אמר כנגד עשרת הדברות שנאמרו לו למשה בסיני *ר׳ יוחנן אמר כנגד עשרה מאמרות שבהן נברא העולם הי נינהו ויאמר (*ויאמר) דבראשית מ׳ הוו בראשית נמי מאמר הוא דכתיב °בדבר ה׳ שמים נעשו: ר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אומר אם אמר שש שש שלש מכולן יצא: איבעיא להו היכי קתני שלש מן התורה שלש מן הנביאים שלש מן הכתובים והוו תשע ואיבא ביניהו חדא או דלמא אחד מן התורה ואחד מן הנביאים ואחד מן הכתובים והויין להו שלש ואיבא ביניהו טובא ת״ש דתניא אין פותחין מעשרה מלכיות מעשרה זכרונות מעשרה שופרות ואם אמר שבע מכולן יצא כנגד שבעה רקיעים רבי יוחנן בן נורי אמר הפותח לא יפתוח משבע ואם אמר שלש מכולן יצא כנגד תורה נביאים וכתובים ואמרי לה כנגד כהנים לוים וישראלים אמר *רב הונא אמר שמואל הלכה כר׳ יוחנן בן נורי: מתני׳ °אין מזכירין (זכרון מלכות ושופר) של פורענות מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא ר׳ יוסי אומר אם השלים בתורה יצא:

*) [ני׳ סרייס רב חסונא אמר שמואל וגו׳ כרמ״ב ר״נ אמר שמואל] **) [מלכות וזכרונות ושופרות כ״ל וכ״ת כסרייס וכסרייס ומשמה שניהם]

מסורת חתים

מתני׳ סדר ברכות אומר אבות וגבורות וקדושת השם כו׳. דתנינא בשלש תקיעות של שלש שלש כדתניא לקמן (דף לג.): גמ׳ רחמנא אמר אידכר. כדתניא בבכירתא לקמן: לימא תשע דהואיל ואשתרי. מלכיות תורה אור מזכרונות לענין תקיעה שלין תוקעין בהן משתי נמי לפתוח ממן: בני אלים. ליתנו דמקיפי כמו וחם לילי המרן לקח (יחזקאל יו): הבו לה׳. הכתיבו לפנינו המיחמיס: מפני מה לא נאמר שבתון שבות שהרי פתח בו הכתוב תחילה. והוו נח להזכיר על המלאכה שהיא עיקר וכך יפה לדרוש הוצ׳ל והוו למלון ממקרא והמתינה לכולם: אני ה׳ אלהיכם. לענני ולגר מעזוב ומניף ליה בחתם הסמיני זכרון תרועה: אני ה׳ אלהיכם. הוצ׳ל לשון למי פי מלון לכם: אף כאן באמצע. והיום משע נרכות הן ותומרה בחמיניה: ירד רבי יוחנן בן ברוקא לפני ויקח״דכתיב °שבתון זכרון תרועה מקרא קדש שבתון זה קדושת היום וזכרון התיבה. לפי שחתוה להחפלל במקום אלו זכרונות תרועה אלו שופרות מקרא קדש קדשהו בעשירית מלאכה אמר לו רבי עקיבא מפני מה לא נאמר שבתון שבות שבו פתח הכתוב תחילה אלא שבתון קדשהו בעשירית מלאכה זכרון אלו זכרונות תרועה אלו שיפרות מקרא קדש זו קדושת היום מנין שאומרים מלכיות תניא רבי אומר °אני ה׳ אלהיכם (ו) ובחדש השביעי זו מלכות רבי יוסי בר יהודה אומר אינו צריך הרי הוא אומר °יהיו לכם לזכרון לפני אלהיכם שאין תלמוד לומר אני ה׳ אלהיכם ומה תלמוד לומר אני ה׳ אלהיכם זה בנה אב לכל מקום שנאמר בו זכרונות יהיו מלכיות עמהן והיכן אומרה לקדושת היום תניא *רבי אומר עם המלכיות אומרה מה מצינו בכל מקום ברביעית אף כאן ברביעית רשב״ג אומר עם הזכרונות אומרה מה מצינו בכל מקום באמצע אף כאן באמצע ובשקדשו ב״ד את השנה באושא ירד ר׳ יוחנן בן ברוקא לפני רשב״ג ועשה כר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אמר לו רבן שמעון לא היו נוהגין כן ביבנה ליום השני ירד רבי חנינא בנו של רבי יוסי הגלילי ועשה כר״ע אמר רשב״ג כך היו נוהגין ביבנה למימרא דרבי שמעון בן גמליאל כר׳ עקיבא ס״ל והא אמר ר״ע מלכיות עם קדושת היום אמר להו ורשב״ג אומר קדושת היום עם הזכרונות אמר להו א״ד הגלילי ועשה כר״ע אמר רשב״ג כך היו נוהגין ביבנה למימרא דרבי חנינא בנו של רבי יוסי יו״ט שני למימרא דעבירה לאהל *והאמר רבי חנינא בר כהנא (ג) מימות עזרא ואילך לא מצינו אהל שמועבר אמר רב חסדא מאי שני ליום שני לשנה הבאה: מתני׳ °אין פותחין מעשרה מלכיות זכרונות מעשרה שופרות ר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אומר °אם אמר ג׳ ג׳ מכולן יצא: גמ׳ הני עשרה מלכיות כנגד מי אמר (*רבי) כנגד עשרה הללים שאמר דוד בספר תהלים הלוים טובא הוו הכי דכתיב °הללוהו בתקע שופר רב יוסף אמר כנגד עשרת הדברות שנאמרו לו למשה בסיני *ר׳ יוחנן אמר כנגד עשרה מאמרות שבהן נברא העולם הי נינהו ויאמר (*ויאמר) דבראשית מ׳ הוו בראשית נמי מאמר הוא דכתיב °בדבר ה׳ שמים נעשו: ר׳ יוחנן בן נורי אומר אם אמר שש שש שלש מכולן יצא: איבעיא להו היכי קתני שלש מן התורה שלש מן הנביאים שלש מן הכתובים והוו תשע ואיבא ביניהו חדא או דלמא אחד מן התורה ואחד מן הנביאים ואחד מן הכתובים והויין להו שלש ואיבא ביניהו טובא ת״ש דתניא אין פותחין מעשרה מלכיות מעשרה זכרונות מעשרה שופרות ואם אמר שבע מכולן יצא כנגד שבעה רקיעים רבי יוחנן בן נורי אמר הפותח לא יפתוח משבע ואם אמר שלש מכולן יצא כנגד תורה נביאים וכתובים ואמרי לה כנגד כהנים לוים וישראלים אמר *רב הונא אמר שמואל הלכה כר׳ יוחנן בן נורי: מתני׳ °אין מזכירין (זכרון מלכות ושופר) של פורענות מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא ר׳ יוסי אומר אם השלים בתורה יצא: גמ׳

מסורת חתים

ואיבא דמתני נמי לימא מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות ומשמע דלא מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא: ת״ש מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא: ואיבעיא מדקתני מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא ש״מ מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא: ואי ס״ד מתחיל בתורה ומשלים בנביא מאי קא משמע לן

Mishnah

The Mishnah is a core collection of rabbinic commentary and legal discussion redacted in the 3rd Century CE by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi ("Judah the Prince"). This collection marks the beginning of what is known as "rabbinic literature," marking the shift in religious authority from the priests to the rabbinic academies, following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

The Mishnah records actual legal disputes as a way of interpreting how the *mitzvot* of Torah should be carried out in a post-Exilic world.

Mishnah records rabbinic discussions, although the discursive format is imposed by the editor. The rabbis were not in fact sitting in one room talking through problems all together.

The rabbis whose ideas were recorded in Mishnah are called *tanna'im.* Among the most famous were the typically disagreeing Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai.

Mishnah is divided into 6 *sidrot,* or "orders". They are:

Zeraim ("seeds") – dealing wiht prayer, blessings, tithes and agricultural laws.

Mo'ed ("festival") – dealing with the laws of Shabbat and festivals.

Nashim ("women") – dealing with marriage and divorce laws

Nezikin ("damages") – dealing with tort law and criminal law

Kodashim ("holy things") – dealing with Temple sacrifices and dietary laws

Tahorot ("purities) – dealing with laws of purity and impurity

Each of these *sidrot* is made up of 7-12 tractates.

Although Mishnah can be studied on its own, it is more commonly studied embedded in pages of Gemara, making up what we think of as Talmud.

Gemara

The generations of sages who followed those of the Mishnah continued to discuss and develop the law. Gemara, meaning "completion", sees itself as the fulfillment and completion of the conversations begun in Mishnah. The Mishnah and Gemara together are called Talmud.

The rabbis whose ideas are recorded in Gemara are called *amora'im.* An individual discussion in Gemara begins generally with a quote from Mishnah, and then responses to it. A whole discussion in Gemara is referred to as a *sugiyah.* Sometimes a teaching from rabbis of the Mishnaic era that is not actually attested in Mishnah is brought; such an anonymous mishnaic teaching is called a *Baraita.*

There are two separate redactions of Talmud. One was done by the academies in Babylonia and is called the Babylonian Talmud. One was done by the academies in the Holy Land and is referred to either as the Palestinian Talmud or the Jerusalem Talmud. These two Talmuds discuss the same topics but

do not always arrive at the same conclusions. They also had different spheres of influence. The Babylonian Talmud came to be authoritative in Europe; the Jerusalem Talmud was authoritative for Jews living in Arab lands and in the Mediterranean basin.

A Sample Sugiyah of Mishnah

Mishnah Berakhot 1.1.

מֵאֵימָתַי קוֹרִין אֶת שְׁמַע בְּעַרְבִית. מִשָּׁעָה שֶׁהַכֹּהֲנִים נִכְנָסִים לֶאֱכֹל בִּתְרוּמָתָן, עַד סוֹף הָאַשְׁמוּרָה הָרִאשׁוֹנָה, דִּבְרֵי רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר. וַחֲכָמִים אוֹמְרִים, עַד חֲצוֹת. רַבָּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר, עַד שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה עַמּוּד הַשָּׁחַר. מַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁבָּאוּ בָנָיו מִבֵּית הַמִּשְׁתֶּה, אָמְרוּ לוֹ, לֹא קָרִינוּ אֶת שְׁמַע. אָמַר לָהֶם, אִם לֹא עָלָה עַמּוּד הַשַּׁחַר, חַיָּבִין אַתֶּם לִקְרוֹת. וְלֹא זוֹ בִּלְבַד, אֶלָּא כָּל מַה שֶּׁאָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים עַד חֲצוֹת, מִצְוָתָן עַד שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה עַמּוּד הַשָּׁחַר. הֶקְטֵר חֲלָבִים וְאֵבָרִים, מִצְוָתָן עַד שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה עַמּוּד הַשָּׁחַר. וְכָל הַנֶּאֱכָלִים לְיוֹם אֶחָד, מִצְוָתָן עַד שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה עַמּוּד הַשָּׁחַר. אִם כֵּן, לָמָּה אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים עַד חֲצוֹת, כְּדֵי לְהַרְחִיק אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעֲבֵרָה׃

From when does one recite *Shema* in the evening? From the time when the priests enter to partake of their *teruma*. Until the end of the first watch. That is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer. The Rabbis say: until midnight. Rabban Gamliel says: until dawn. There was an incident where his sons returned from a wedding hall. They said to him, We did not recite *Shema*. He said to them: If the dawn has not arrived, you are obligated to recite it. And not only in this regard; but rather, wherever the Sages say until midnight, the mitzvah is until dawn. Such as the burning of fats and limbs. And, so for all that are eaten for one day: until dawn. If so, why did the Sages say until midnight? In order to distance a person from transgression.

Explicated Translation as it appears in Sefaria:
[Here Mishna text appears in bold and explanatory language in regular font.]

From when, that is, from what time, does **one recite *Shema* in the evening? From the time when the priests enter to partake of their *teruma.*** Until when does the time for the recitation of the evening *Shema* extend? **Until the end of the first watch.** The term used in the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:7) to indicate the time for the recitation of the evening *Shema* is *beshokhbekha*, when you lie down, which refers to the time in which individuals go to sleep. Therefore, the time for the recitation of *Shema* is the first portion of the night, when individuals typically prepare for sleep. **That is the statement of Rabbi Eliezer. The Rabbis say:** The time for the recitation of the evening *Shema* is **until midnight. Rabban Gamliel says:** One may recite *Shema* **until dawn,** indicating that *beshokhbekha* is to be understood as a reference to the entire time people sleep in their beds, the whole night. The mishna relates that Rabban Gamliel practiced in accordance with his ruling. There was an **incident** where Rabban Gamliel's **sons returned** very late **from a wedding hall. They said to him,** as they had been preoccupied with celebrating with the groom and bride: **We did not recite *Shema.* He said to them: If the dawn has not** yet **arrived, you are obligated to recite** *Shema*. Since Rabban Gamliel's opinion disagreed with that of the Rabbis, he explained to his sons that the Rabbis actually agree with him, **and** that it is **not only** with regard to the *halakha* of the recitation of *Shema*, **but rather, wherever the Sages say until**

midnight, the mitzva may be performed **until dawn.** Rabban Gamliel cites several cases in support of his claim, such as **the burning of fats and limbs** on the altar. Due to the quantity of offerings each day, the priests were often unable to complete the burning of all of the fats and limbs, so they continued to be burned into the night, as it is written: "This is the law of the burnt offering: The burnt offering shall remain upon the pyre on the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar burns it" (Leviticus 6:2). **And,** with regard to **all** sacrifices, such as the sin-offerings and the guilt-offerings **that are eaten for one day** and night; although the Sages state that they may be eaten only until midnight, by Torah law they may be eaten **until dawn.** This is in accordance with the verse: "On the day on which it is offered must you eat. Do not leave it until the morning" (Leviticus 7:15). **If so, why did the Sages say** that they may be eaten only **until midnight?** This is **in order to distance a person from transgression,** as if one believes that he has until dawn to perform the mitzva, he might be negligent and postpone it until the opportunity to perform the mitzva has passed.

Daf Yomi

Beginning in 1920, a custom began of Jews around the world reading and studying Talmud in sync, one page per day. It has been a slow grow, but the current cycle, which began in January 2020, has been more popular than ever. Numerous online groups, podcasts, and listserves bring the day's page (*daf yomi*) to interested readers. It takes approximately 7 years to work through the 37 tractates (*masekhtot*) of the Babylonian Talmud. (The Jerusalem Talmud has 39 *masekhtot.*)

One good source for diving into Daf Yomi practice is through myjewishlearning.com. You can subscribe to a Daily Dose of Talmud – just an extract from the day's page, explored by a rotating team of rabbis. Copy this URL into your browser to sign up: https://www.myjewishlearning.com/get-your-daily-dose-of-talmud/

Tablet Magazine online also has a Daf Yomi podcast called "Take One." Find it here: https://www.tabletmag.com/podcasts/take-one/

My very favorite Daf Yomi podcast is Rabbanit Michelle Cohen Farber's "Daf Yomi for Women." She is a very learned Orthodox teacher and moves very quickly, using a lot of Hebrew jargon. And yet she is captivating and more accessible than you'd guess. Listen or subscribe by copying this URL into your browser: https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/daf-yomi-for-women-hadran/id1493412881

And to read about the experience of studying Talmud *daf yomi*-style, try *If All the Seas Were Ink: A Memoir,* by Ilana Kurshan (2017).

Midrash

"Midrash" is a loose term that refers to extra-biblical rabbinic material of an "aggadic" – or legendary – sort. Many of what we think of as our popular Torah stories – Lilith and Adam, young Abraham smashing the idols, baby Moses reaching for the hot coals, the Israelite women and the mirrors – are not in Torah at all. Instead, they come from other places in rabbinic literature.

Talmud itself is a source of some midrashic material. The other key sources are:

Midrash Rabbah. First published together in the 16th Century, this is a large collection of aggadic material organized around the Five Books of Moses and the Five Megillot. Like other collections of midrash, Midrash Rabbah compiles older material. The volumes are named after the books they riff off of, so Genesis Rabbah, Exodus Rabbah, etc. (More often in Hebrew: B'reishit Rabbah, Sh'mot Rabbah.)

Ein Yaakov. Also published in the 16th Century, this is a compendium of aggadic material in Talmud. Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov ibn Habib, begun in Spain, completed in Salonica. A scholarly English-language version was published in Chicago in 1921, and is still in print.

Other compilations of midrash include Midrash Aggadah, Midrash Tehillim, Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, Sefer HaYashar, Yalkut Shimoni, Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael. All of these are available for exploring on sefaria.org.

Legal Codes

Talmud is a good read, but difficult for determining *halakhah ma'asit* – practical law. If you need to know how high to make the *sukkah* or how long to soak the flax, searching through Talmud is untenable. What's more, Talmud was not the last word on law. Rabbinic rulings continued to issue, sometimes intended for the entire Jewish world, sometimes for a single community, sometimes for a single case.

Over time, legal scholars began compiling law into codes for easier reference, although the codes themselves were/are often many volumes long. At least it would give the local rabbi an easier starting place for answering the community's questions.

The two most famous codes are:

Mishneh Torah. This was compiled from 1170-1180 CE by Moses Maimonides while he was living in Egypt, and is considered to be his master work. Its rules sometimes contradict Talmud, but are nonetheless granted authority. The Mishneh Torah is a vehicle by which Sefardi thought and practices entered France and Germany.

Shulchan Arukh (the "Set Table"). Authored in Tzefat in 1563 by Rabbi Yosef Karo. Karo meant for it to unite the entire Jewish world in Sephardic practice. However a commentary on the Shulchan Arukh by Polish Rabbi Moses Isserles called *Hamapah* ("the Tablecloth"), describing Ashkenazi customs where they differ from Sephardic customs, has been a standard part of every printing of the Shulchan Arukh since 1578.

Arba'ah Turim. By Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher in the early 1300s in Castille.

Philosophy

Just a couple key medieval texts:

Al-Hidayah ila Faraid al-Qulub, "**The Duties of the Heart**," by Rabbi Bahya ibn Paqudah, around 1080, Andalusia. This is largely a code of ethics and an attempt to cast Judaism as a religion based on rational principles. He created a philosophy based on Neo-Platonism, but eliminating elements that ran counter to monotheism and Jewish law.

Perhaps our most famous book of philosophy is Maimonides' **Guide for the Perplexed**, published around 1190 in Judeo-Arabic. In it, Maimonides presents a cosmology based on Greek philosophy, and actively rejects all anthropomorphic presentations of God. He explains the imagery in Torah as metaphors used to ease teaching of Jewish principles. But to understand God, one must negate every attribute of the Divine presented. An excerpt of the *Guide's* challenging of anthropomorphic God language:

> [When] physical organs are ascribed to the Most Perfect Being . . . they are mere indications of the actions generally performed by means of these organs. Such actions being perfections respecting ourselves, are predicated of God, because we wish to express that He is most perfect in every respect, as we remarked …in explaining the Rabbinical phrase,
>
> דִּבְּרָה תּוֹרָה כִּלְשׁוֹן בְּנֵי אָדָם
>
> *Torah speaks in the language of humankind.*
>
> Examples of organs of touch applied to God: "the hand of the Lord" (Exodus 9:3); "with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:18); "the work of Thy fingers" (Psalms 8:4); "And Thou hast laid Thine hand upon me" (Psalms 139:5); "The arm of the Lord" (Isaiah 53:1); "Thy right hand, O Lord" (Exodus 15:6). . .
>
> I do not believe that anyone can doubt the correctness of the assertion that the Creator is not in need of anything for the continuance of His existence, or for the improvement of His condition. Therefore, God has no organs; God is not corporeal; His actions are accomplished by His Essence, not by any organ. (*Guide*, Chapter XLIV).

There are many modern Jewish philosophers, some addressing philosophical and theological issues within Judaism; some more outward facing, dealing with issues of economics, politics, etc. A few texts of note might include these (although there are so many more):

Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677)

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: Or On Religious Power and Judaism* (1783)

Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934)

Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923)

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (1997)

Judith Plaskow: *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1990)

Sefer Yetzirah ("the Book of Formation") is likely the oldest surviving text of Judaism's mystical tradition. Some date if back to the times of Rabbi Akiva (Roman antiquity). The Sefer Yetzirah itself claims to be the words of the patriarch Abraham. It might be that it was redacted in late antiquity but contains traditions that are older.

It is a very cryptic text, but seems to offer the mechanisms of the creation of the universe, originating the idea that God brought about creation through Ten Sefirot and 22 Hebrew letters. The famous opening goes like this:

> By thirty-two mysterious paths of wisdom Yah has engraved [all things], [who is] the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the living God, the Almighty God, He that is uplifted and exalted, He that Dwells forever, and whose Name is holy; having created His world by three [derivatives] of [the Hebrew root-word] *s*^{e}*f*^{a}*r* : namely, *sefer* (a book), *sefor* (a count) and *sippur* (a story), along with ten calibrations of empty space, twenty-two letters [of the Hebrew alphabet], [of which] three are principal [letters] (i.e. א מ ש), seven are double-sounding [consonants] (i.e. בגד כפר ת) and twelve are ordinary [letters] (i.e. ה ו ז ח ט י ל נ ס ע צ ק).

The recommended edition is *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation in Theory and Practice* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan z"l, which unpacks every sentence, often harmonizing them with modern physics. Very trippy and beautiful.

Sefer HaBahir ("the Book of Illumination") is a possibly medieval book of mysticism, although attributed to Rabbi Nehunya ben HaKanah, a first-century sage. The book is written in a midrashic style, commenting on verses from Genesis. Sefer HaBahir is the first known work to begin to systematize the *sefirot* into a system of flow of Divine power.

The Zohar ("Radiance") is a multi-volume work of mysticism, looking at the nature of Divine power, Divine unification, mechanics of the Creation, and the origin of the Universe. Zohar first appears in Spain in the 13th Century, published by Moses de León, but its internatl origin story is that it is the work of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai ("the Rashbi"), a 2nd-Century sage of the Mishnah. It is written in a puzzling Aramaic, unlike any other – perhaps a medieval attempt to imitate ancient Aramaic. The Zohar is cryptic and poetic, reading often like a psychedelic trip. It works off a frame story of the Rashbi and his followers wandering through landscapes and pausing to discuss miracles that they stumble into. Their conversations can be sparked by something they see, hear, taste or smell – the senses are very present in Zohar. The Tree of Life in Zohar is both a system and a living tree, with fruit, flower, and fragrance. Running through Zohar is a fascination with the Shekhinah and the details of her unification with the Holy One, for instance this explication of how Shekhinah and the Holy One unite as bride and groom when the people of Israel recite Shema:

בְּשַׁעְתָּא דְּקָא מְיַחֲדֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִחוּדָא דִּרְזָא דִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּרְעוּתָא שְׁלִים, כְּדֵין נָפִיק מִגּוֹ סְתִימוּ דְּעָלְמָא עִלָּאָה חַד נְהִירוּ, וְהַהוּא נְהִירוּ בָּטַשׁ גּוֹ בּוּצִינָא דְּקַרְדִּינוּתָא, וְאִתְפְּלַג לְשִׁבְעִין נְהוֹרִין, וְאִנּוּן שִׁבְעִין לַהֲטֵי (נְהוֹרִין) בְּשִׁבְעִין עַנְפִין דְּאִילָנָא דְּחַיֵּי...

In the moment that Israel causes a unification in the Mystery of Shema Yisrael, with their full will, then a light emerges from the hiddenness of the Upper World, and that light strikes a spark of dark, and it shatters into 70 lights, and these are the 70 flames in the 70 branches of the Tree of Life.[1]

Then that Tree emits fragrance and incense, and all the trees of the Garden of Eden, they all emit fragrance and they praise their Master,

And behold, then the Matronita is garbed to be brought to the *chupah* with her groom, and all those upper limbs, they all intertwine in one desire and one will, to be one, with no separation at all.

And then her groom is garbed to be brought to the *chupah* in a unification into one, to be united with the Matronita. . . .

And in this way we arouse her and say, *Shema Yisrael,* garb yourself! Behold, your husband is coming to you in his fancy garb, ready to stand opposite you.

Adonai Eloheynu Adonai echad. In a unification to one, with one will, with no separation, in which all of those limbs are made one, and enter into a single desire.

When Israel says *Adonai Echad* in an awakening of six "sides," then all those six facets are made one, and they enter into one desire. And the mystery of the vav[2] of one: in the stripping away of all else, with no other devotion on his part, but rather he is alone, stripped of everything, and he is One.

At that moment the Matronita is garbed and adorned and her *shameses* bring her in to her groom, and in a serious whisper they say, *baruch shem k'vod malkhuto l'olam va'ed.*

Behold it is in a whisper, because that is how one is supposed to usher a bride in to her husband. How worthy is the People who know this, and who, in their faith, conduct the supernal wedding.

Recommended reading about Zohar: Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar.*

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1. Seventy might be about the 7 lower *sefirot*, each of which holographically holds all ten *sefirot.* Or maybe the word *shema* is being reread as *šam 'ayin* or *šem 'ayin* – the name of "70."

2. The letter *vav* is associated with the *sefirah* of *yesod,* and thus the eros between the Holy One and Shekhinah. It is the phallus. It is grammatically a conjunction. Its properties as a joiner are not just geographic pertaining to the Tree of Life, but in language as well. And it is the number 6, the holder of the 5 *sefirot* above it and itself.

Chasidut

The core texts of Chasidut (Chasidism, or *Chasides* in Ashkenezi pronunciation) are continued mystical and metaphysical speculations about Creation, Shekhinah, Divine Will, and the individual ability to be in *d'veykes* (*d'veykut* – intimate relationship) with God.

Some of these texts have been translated, some not. Here are a few of the most popularly studied Chasidic texts:

Tanya – teachings of Rebbe Shneur Zalman of Liadi, forefather of the Chabad Lubavitch movement (1745-1812)

Kedushat Levi – teachings of Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810)

Degel Machaneh Ephraim (or just "The Degel") – teachings of Rebbe Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov (1748-1800)

Noam Elimelech – teachings of Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1786)

Mohara"n – teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav (1782-1810)

Resources

Sefaria.org

Being able to draw connections between Torah text, Talmud, Midrash, commentary, philosophy, and mysticism, used to require a large physical library, and nearly encyclopedic knowledge of text.

Sefaria.org is a growing, open-source portal for Jewish text. Many key Jewish texts are represented, although not all translated into English yet. Links between texts of different type and era are made explicit and clickable.

Gemara – the second layer of Talmud. Gemara is commentary and debate on the *Mishnah,* which is commentary and debate on Torah. Mishnah and Gemara together make up Talmud.

Halakhah ("the way") – a generic term for Jewish law. Talmud might debate different ways to carry out a *mitzvah* of Torah, and then pronounce its determination saying, "and the *halakhah* is..."

Ketuvim ("writings") – the Books of the last section of the Hebrew Bible, running from Psalms through Chronicles. These books include prayer (Psalms), wisdom (Proverbs), philosophical problems (Job and Ecclesiastes), novellas (Esther and Ruth), and remembrance of destruction (Lamentations).

Midrash – rabbinic books commenting on the books of Tanakh, usually by providing imaginative explanations or legends not included in Tanakh.

Mishnah – the earliest books of rabbinic commentary on Torah, compiled during Roman times, not only explicating but exploring how to carry out *mitzvot* in changed circumstances.

Nevi'im ("prophets")– the Books of the middle section of the Hebrew Bible, running from Joshua to Malakhi. They tell of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, the establishment of government by judges, the creation of a united kingdom under King David, the breaking up of the kingdom into two, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria, then of Judah by Babylonia; and the words of the many prophets warning against sin and offering redemption.

Pasuk – a verse of Torah. Plural is *p'sukim.*

Parashah – a weekly Torah portion, several chapters long. Plural is *parashiyot* or *parshiyot.*

Rabbinic literature – post-biblical writing during an era in which religious authority was vested in rabbis rather than the ancient priests. Examples include Talmud and Midrash.

Torah ("teaching") – the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, or the entire Hebrew Bible, or all of an individual's wisdom or teaching.

Talmud – early books of Torah commentary, discussing through a pretense of debate and conversation, how *mitzvot* are to be carried out in post-biblical times. There are two works of Talmud – the Babylonian and the Palestinian (or "Jerusalem"). Each is made up of Mishnah followed by continued debate, called Gemara.

Tanakh – the Hebrew Bible. This term is an acronym for Torah, Nevi'im ("Prophets") and Ketuvim ("Writings").

Targum – an Aramaic translation and gloss on the Hebrew Bible. There are two prominent Targumim: Yonatan and Onkelos. Both offer interpretive translations which reveal popular understandings of Torah in antiquity.

Zohar – the most influential book of Jewish mysticism, written in an ecstatic poetic form, first published in medieval Spain, but possibly containing older material. The book itself claims to be the work of the ancient sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.